



Reconstruction of Integrative Character Education: A Comparative Analysis of the Thought of Imam Al-Ghazali and Thomas Lickona in Contemporary Moral Crisis

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Abstract:

This study aims to analyze the concept of character education according to Imam Al-Ghazali and Thomas Lickona and examine the relevance of the integration of the two ideas in contemporary Islamic education. This research uses a qualitative approach with the library research method. Data was obtained from books, scientific journals, and various relevant academic publications. The data analysis technique was carried out through content analysis and comparative analysis to find similarities, differences, and forms of integration of the concept of character education of the two characters. The results of the study show that Imam Al-Ghazali emphasized character education through the formation of morals, purification of the soul, self-control, habituation, and example based on Islamic spiritual values. Meanwhile, Thomas Lickona emphasized character education through the development of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action systematically to form moral awareness and social responsibility of students. Despite having different foundations of thought, the two characters have the same goal, which is to form human beings with morals and good character. This study concludes that the integration of Al-Ghazali and Thomas Lickona's thinking can be a more comprehensive and relevant model of character education in dealing with moral crises in the digital era. The implications of this study show that character education needs to be applied holistically through synergy between schools, families, and the social environment in order to form students who have strong moral integrity, spirituality, and social responsibility.

INTRODUCTION

The development of the digital era and the current of globalization has brought major changes in the world of education, including in the aspect of character formation of students (Herawati et al., 2025). Advances in information technology have a positive impact on the learning process, but on the other hand it also raises various moral problems such as low communication ethics,

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increasing individualistic behavior, intolerance, bullying, and a decrease in the sense of social responsibility among the younger generation. This phenomenon shows that education has not been fully able to form students who are not only intellectually intelligent, but also have good character and morals (Syarif, 2025). Therefore, character education is one of the main needs in the modern education system, especially in Islamic education which places moral development as the main goal of education (Lickona, 1992).

Character education is essentially a process of forming values, attitudes, and behaviors that are carried out consciously and sustainably so that students are able to apply moral values in daily life (Fuadhah, 2024). From the perspective of Islamic education, character is synonymous with morals related to human relationships with Allah SWT, fellow humans, and the environment. Character education is not only oriented to mastering theory, but also to habituating behaviors that reflect religious values, honesty, responsibility, discipline, and social concern (Muhammad et al., 2024). Thus, character education has a strategic position in shaping the quality of human resources with integrity and good personality.

One of the Islamic educational figures who had a great concern for character formation was Imam Al-Ghazali. According to Imam Al-Ghazali, education should be directed to the formation of morals and purification of the soul so that humans are able to achieve happiness in this world and the hereafter. According to Al-Ghazali, character education is carried out through habituation, example, self-control, and the cultivation of spiritual values in daily life (Ibn Ibrahim Ba'adillah, 2011). The concept emphasizes that character is not formed instantly, but through a continuous educational process (Saepuddin, 2019).

Meanwhile, Thomas Lickona as a figure in modern character education views that good character consists of three main elements, namely moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action (Lickona, 1992). According to him, character education is a conscious effort to help students understand moral values, love moral values, and implement these values in real actions. Thomas Lickona's thinking is one of the concepts of character education that is widely used in the development of the modern education system because it is considered relevant to the moral challenges of contemporary society (Lickona, 1992).

Research on character education has been conducted by several researchers before. Research Zuhri et al., (2022) shows that Thomas Lickona's concept of character education has relevance to Islamic Religious Education because it emphasizes cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects in the formation of students' character. Research Saiful et al., (2022) explained that character education, according to Thomas Lickona, aims to shape students to have the ability to understand and practice moral values in daily life. In addition, the research Nofik et al., (2023) emphasized that character education in the perspective of the Qur'an has a close relationship with the formation of students' morals.

The studies on character education that have been carried out still focus on the thoughts of one particular figure and have not studied in depth the relationship between the concept of character education in the perspective of Islamic education and modern Western education. Research on Imam Al-Ghazali's character education generally focuses on the concept of morality, purification of

the soul (tazkiyat al-nafs), and the formation of spiritual morals, while research on Thomas Lickona emphasizes more pedagogical aspects through the development of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action (Huda et al., 2022). Both figures have an important contribution in building character education concepts that are relevant to the challenges of modern education. Imam Al-Ghazali places moral education as the core of human education through habituation, example, and strengthening of spiritual values, while Thomas Lickona emphasizes that character education must be done consciously to help students understand, love, and implement moral values in daily life (Lickona, 2013). Therefore, the integration of these two ideas is important in building a character education model that is more comprehensive and adaptive to the development of the times.

Previous research has shown that there is a relevance between the concept of Islamic character education and modern character education. (Huda et al., 2022) explains that the thoughts of Imam Al-Ghazali and Thomas Lickona have something in common with the goal of forming moral and responsible human beings in social life. However, the research is still limited to general conceptual studies and has not led to the formulation of an integrative character education model in contemporary Islamic education. Research by Aprillia et al., (2023) examines the tradition of ta'dzim in Islamic boarding schools through the perspective of Al-Ghazali and Thomas Lickona, but the focus of the research is still limited to the culture of respect for teachers. In addition, Khulashah, (2023) researching character education caring for the environment according to the perspective of Thomas Lickona and Al-Ghazali, but the discussion is more directed at the implementation of environmental education so that it has not examined the integration of character education values as a whole.

On the other hand, the development of globalization and the current digital era has raised various moral problems in the educational environment, such as declining social ethics, low attitudes of responsibility, increasing individualistic behavior, and weak spiritual awareness of students. This condition shows that modern education is not enough to be oriented only to intellectual development, but also to pay attention to the formation of students' character and morals holistically (Nadilanasir et al., 2026). Character education is one of the strategic solutions in dealing with the moral crisis that occurs in modern society. In this context, the integration of the concept of character education of Imam Al-Ghazali and Thomas Lickona becomes relevant because both have the same orientation in shaping human beings who are moral, responsible, and socially concerned despite coming from different epistemological backgrounds (Arif et al., 2023).

The novelty of this research lies in a comparative and integrative analysis of the concept of character education according to Imam Al-Ghazali and Thomas Lickona by focusing on aspects of character values, the role of educators, character formation methods, and their relevance to contemporary Islamic education. This research not only compares the two thoughts, but also seeks to find an integration point between the concept of morality in Islamic education and the concept of character in modern education as a model of character education that is more adaptive to the development of the times. Thus, this research is expected to be able to make a theoretical contribution to the development of character education based on the integration of Islamic spiritual values and modern pedagogical approaches.

Based on this description, this study aims to analyze the concept of character education according to Imam Al-Ghazali and Thomas Lickona and examine the relevance of the integration of these two ideas in the development of contemporary Islamic education.

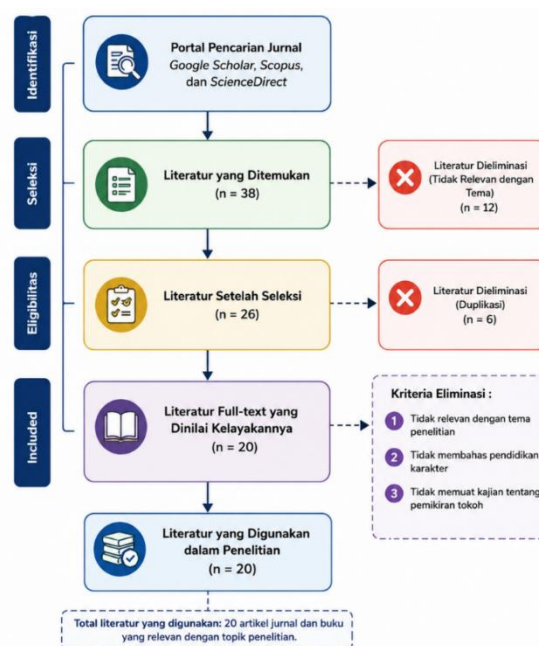
RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a literature study method (*library research*). Literature study is a research method that is carried out through the collection and analysis of various scientific sources relevant to the research topic without conducting direct field research (Febrianto & Siroj, 2024) . This research is focused on a comparative study of the thoughts of Imam Al-Ghazali and Thomas Lickona on character education in the perspective of contemporary Islamic education.

The research procedure is carried out through several stages, namely determining the topic and focus of the research, collecting primary and secondary literature, selecting literature based on the relevance of the research theme, classifying the research data, conducting content analysis and comparative analysis, and compiling the synthesis and conclusions of the research. These stages are carried out systematically to obtain relevant, valid, and relevant data in accordance with the research focus (Haramain, 2026).

The data collection technique was carried out through documentation studies. Research data was obtained from books, journal articles, and scientific works related to character education, the thoughts of Imam Al-Ghazali, and Thomas Lickona. Literature searches were carried out through Google Scholar, Scopus, and ScienceDirect databases using the keywords character education, Islamic character education, Al-Ghazali, and Thomas Lickona. The literature used is prioritized from scientific publications in the last five years to maintain the relevance and freshness of research.

Figure 1. Literature Review Flow Diagrams



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

The findings of the research were obtained through the analysis of 20 scientific articles consisting of 12 national journals and 8 international journals relevant to the theme of character education, the thoughts of Imam Al-Ghazali, and Thomas Lickona. All literature has gone through a systematic identification, selection, and classification process through Google Scholar, Scopus, and ScienceDirect databases in accordance with the literature review flow diagram that has been prepared previously. The literature used is prioritized from publications in the last five years to maintain the relevance and freshness of research. To simplify the data analysis process, as presented in the following table.

Table 1. Research Study Material Code
National Journal

No	Article Title	Year	Author	Code
1	The Concept of Character Education Imam Al-Ghazali's Perspective in Islamic Education	2022	S. Huda, M. Sarifudin, A. Humaidi	JN1
2	Character Education in the Perspective of Thomas Lickona and Its Relevance to Islamic Education	2023	M. Zuhri, S. Wahyuni, A. Rahman	JN2
3	Implementation of Islamic Values-Based Character Education in Schools	2021	S. Saiful, H. Yusliani, R. Rosnidarwati	JN3
4	Integration of Islamic Character Education and Modern Education	2024	M. Arif, U. Hasanah, M. Hidayatullah	JN4
5	Imam Al-Ghazali's Thoughts on the Formation of Students' Morals	2022	N. Hasan, K. Nofik	JN5
6	Moral Education in the Perspective of Islamic Education	2021	R. Fauzi, M. Karim	JN6
7	The Relevance of Character Education in the Digital Era	2023	D. Kurniawan, S. Rahman	JN7
8	Moral Education as the Foundation of Islamic Education	2020	H. Abdullah, F. Karim	JN8
9	Comparative Analysis of Al-Ghazali and Lickona's Character Education	2024	L. Nurhayati, M. Firdaus	JN9
10	Internalization of Character Values in Islamic Education	2022	A. Gratitude, N. Fadilah	JN10
11	Strategies for Building Students' Character	2021	I. Ramadhan, T. Hakim	JN11
12	Character Education Based on Religious Values	2023	Y. Hidayati, R. Maulana	JN12

International Journal				
No	Article Title	Year	Author	Code
13	Character Education in the Digital Age: Challenges and Opportunities	2022	J. Arthur & K. Kristjánsson	J113
14	Islamic Moral Education and Character Development	2021	A. Halstead	J114
15	Moral Education and Student Character Building	2023	T. Lovat & R. Toomey	J115
16	Integrative Character Education in Contemporary Schools	2024	M. Berkowitz & M. Bier	J116
17	Character Education and Religious Values in Modern Education	2022	D. Carr	J117
18	Comparative Perspective of Character Education	2021	L. Nucci & D. Narvaez	J118
19	Character Building in Islamic Educational Institutions	2023	S. Ahmed & M. Yusuf	J119
20	Contemporary Moral Values and Education	2024	R. Smith & P. Gordon	J120

The Concept of Character Education According to Imam Al-Ghazali

The findings of the study show that Imam Al-Ghazali views character education as a process of moral formation oriented towards purification of the soul (*tazkiyat al-nafs*) and the control of passions (Saepuddin, 2019). Character education is not only directed at mastering science, but also at the moral and spiritual formation of students. In Al-Ghazali's perspective, morality is a quality that is embedded in the soul so that it gives birth to good behavior spontaneously without coercion (Syaefudin, 2026).

Based on the results of studies on JN1, JN5, and JN8 sources, character education according to Imam Al-Ghazali is built through example, habituation, strengthening religious values, and self-control. Teachers are positioned as exemplary figures who have an important role in shaping the character of students through moral and spiritual coaching. In the perspective of Al-Ghazali as explained by Ibn Ibrahim Ba'adillah, (2011), character formation must begin from an early age through a conducive educational environment, because a person's character is formed from habits that are constantly carried out until they become part of his personality.

Teachers are positioned as role models who have an important role in shaping the character of students through moral and spiritual coaching, because students tend to imitate the behavior they see firsthand. Therefore, the success of character education is highly dependent on the moral integrity of educators in

carrying out their duties as moral guides. In addition to examples, Al-Ghazali also emphasized the importance of habituation as a process of internalizing character values, such as speaking honestly, respecting others, maintaining discipline, and carrying out worship with full awareness, so that these values are not only understood theoretically but also applied in daily life. Strengthening religious values is the main foundation because the values of faith and spirituality are believed to be able to form noble morals and foster moral awareness and responsibility to God and fellow human beings (Auliya, 2025). On the other hand, self-control is seen as an important ability to control lust, emotions, and desires that can lead to negative behavior. Thus, according to Al-Ghazali, character education not only focuses on the intellectual aspect, but also emphasizes moral and spiritual balance in forming a generation with noble character, discipline, and strong personality (Ibn Ibrahim Ba'adillah, 2011).

Based on the above explanation, it can be concluded that the findings of this study show that the concept of character education of Imam Al-Ghazali has strong relevance to the condition of modern education that is experiencing a moral crisis. It is not enough for education to be oriented only to the transfer of knowledge, but it must also be directed at the formation of students' morals and personalities. These findings are in line with research (Huda et al., 2022) which explains that character education according to Al-Ghazali is oriented towards the formation of human beings who are moral, responsible, and have a strong spiritual awareness.

The Concept of Character Education According to Thomas Lickona

The results of the study show that Thomas Lickona views character education as a conscious and systematic effort to shape the moral behavior of students through the development of aspects of knowledge, feelings, and moral actions. Based on the results of the study on JN2, JI15, and JI16 sources, Thomas Lickona divides character education into three main components, namely moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. Moral knowing is related to the ability of students to understand moral values, distinguish between good and bad behavior, and have ethical awareness in making decisions. This aspect emphasizes the importance of moral knowledge as the basis for character formation so that students are able to think critically and be responsible for their actions (Lickona, 1992).

Moral feeling is related to the formation of inner attitudes and moral emotions, such as empathy, compassion, conscience, shame when making mistakes, and concern for others. According to Lickona, moral knowledge alone is not enough to form a good character if it is not accompanied by emotional awareness and an inner drive to love the good. Therefore, character education must be able to foster moral feelings so that students have social sensitivity and motivation to behave according to moral values (Birhan et al., 2021).

Moral action is a tangible manifestation of moral knowledge and feelings in the form of daily behavior. At this stage, students are directed to get used to positive actions such as being honest, disciplined, responsible, respecting others, and being able to work together in social life (Zulela et al., 2022). Lickona emphasized that good character is not only seen from the ability to understand moral values, but also from the consistency of individuals in applying those values

in real actions. Thus, according to Thomas Lickona, character education emphasizes a balance between cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects so that it is able to form students who have moral integrity, social responsibility, and good personality(Lickona, 1992).

Table 2. Thomas Lickona's Character Education Component

Components	Description
<i>Moral Knowledge</i>	Ability to understand moral values and principles
<i>Moral Feelings</i>	Emotional awareness to love moral values
<i>Moral Action</i>	Ability to apply moral values in tangible actions

Thomas Lickona emphasized that character education must be applied in a sustainable manner through the involvement of schools, families, and the social environment as a unit that supports each other in the process of forming students' morals. According to Lickona explained by Damariswara et al., (2021), character education cannot run effectively if it is only imposed on schools, but requires cooperation between educators, parents, and the community in creating an environment that is able to instill moral values consistently. Therefore, character education needs to be carried out systematically so that students not only have intellectual intelligence, but also are able to develop good moral and social attitudes in daily life.

The findings of the study show that Thomas Lickona's concept focuses more on pedagogical and psychological approaches in the formation of students' characters. Character education is not only understood as a theoretical process of teaching values, but also as an effort to habituate moral behavior through real experience, example, school culture, and positive social interaction. In this perspective, students are directed to understand moral values, feel the importance of these values, and be able to apply them in daily actions. This is in line with research Dabdoub et al., (2024) which states that modern character education requires the integration of moral learning and the formation of a positive school culture so that character values can be embedded more effectively. Thus, Thomas Lickona's concept of character education emphasizes that the success of character formation is greatly influenced by the consistency of the educational environment in building students' moral habits, discipline, responsibility, and social concern in a sustainable manner.

DISCUSSION

Comparative Analysis of the Thought of Imam Al-Ghazali and Thomas Lickona

The results of the analysis show that the thoughts of Imam Al-Ghazali and Thomas Lickona have similarities in the goal of character education, which is to form moral, responsible, and well-behaved human beings in social life. Both figures view that character education is not only oriented to mastering science, but also to forming the personality and behavior of students so that they are able to live in accordance with the moral values that apply in society. In addition, both emphasized the importance of the process of habituation and example as the main method in shaping character. According to Al-Ghazali and Lickona, good character cannot be formed instantly, but through an educational process that is carried out

continuously and consistently in the family, school, and community environment (Abrori, 2023).

Although they have similar goals, there are fundamental differences between the two ideas in their foundation, orientation, and approach to character education. Al-Ghazali emphasizes character education on spiritual aspects and moral development based on Islamic values, especially the Qur'an and Sunnah. Character education is seen as a process of purification of the soul and self-control so that humans are able to achieve noble morals and closeness to God. Therefore, character formation according to Al-Ghazali is closely related to strengthening spirituality, controlling lust, and habituating worship in daily life (Ibn Ibrahim Ba'adillah, 2011).

On the other hand, Thomas Lickona emphasizes more pedagogical and psychological approaches in shaping students' characters. Lickona views character education as a systematic process that includes the development of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. This approach focuses more on the formation of moral awareness, the ability to think ethically, empathy, and the application of moral values in real actions. The moral values developed are universal and can be applied in the social life of modern society without being tied to a particular religion. Thus, Lickona's thinking emphasizes the aspects of formal education and structured moral learning strategies in the school environment (Lickona, 1992).

Table 3. Comparative Analysis of Character Education

Aspects	Imam Al-Ghazali	Thomas Lickona
Educational Orientation	Morality and spirituality	Morals and social behavior
Basic Thinking	Qur'an and Sunnah	Universal moral values
Education Focus	Purification of soul and morals	<i>Moral knowledge, moral feelings, and moral actions</i>
Educational Methods	Example and habituation	Systematic moral learning
Educational Objectives	Noble human beings	Responsible citizens

The findings of this study are in line with research conducted by Mainuddin et al., (2023) suggests that the integration of the two concepts can result in a more comprehensive model of character education. The spiritual and moral values in Al-Ghazali's thought can strengthen the religious dimension of character education, while Thomas Ligon's approach can strengthen the systematic implementation of character education in the modern school environment.

The Relevance of Character Education to Contemporary Islamic Education

The development of the digital era has given rise to various moral problems, such as declining social ethics, individualism, intolerance, and weak social responsibility of students. This condition shows that modern education is not only oriented to intellectual development, but also requires strengthening the

character and morals of students as a whole (Sholeh et al., 2022).

The results of the study show that the thoughts of Imam Al-Ghazali and Thomas Lickona have a strong relevance in the development of contemporary Islamic education. The concept of moral education Al-Ghazali is able to provide a spiritual foundation in character formation, while Thomas Ligon's approach provides a more systematic and applicable model of character education implementation in the school environment.

These findings reinforce the research Saifuddin et al., (2025) which states that the integration of Islamic character education and modern character education can be a strategic solution in dealing with the moral crisis of the younger generation in the digital era. Therefore, character education needs to be integrated in a sustainable manner in the educational process through synergy between family, school, and the social environment so that the moral formation of students can run optimally.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study shows that the thoughts of Imam Al-Ghazali and Thomas Lickona have the same goal, which is to form students who are moral, responsible, and have good moral behavior. Imam Al-Ghazali emphasized the formation of morals through spiritual strengthening, example, habituation, and self-control, while Thomas Lickona emphasized character education through moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action in a systematic manner. The results of the study show that the integration of the two ideas is relevant to answer the moral crisis in the digital era because it is able to combine Islamic spiritual values with modern character education approaches. Therefore, character education needs to be implemented in a sustainable manner through cooperation between schools, families, and the social environment in order to form students who are not only intellectually intelligent, but also have strong character and social responsibility. Further research is recommended to examine the implementation of this integrative character education model directly in Islamic educational institutions.

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